# Joint Centre for Mesoscale Meteorology, Reading, UK

## A Frontal Wave Database

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This document describes the database on frontal waves being developed at JCMM, Reading University. An outline of related software development is included. A number of new diagnostic quantities are referred to; those not documented elsewhere are described in Appendices.

## 1. Overview

Cyclones give rise to most of the significant weather observed in middle latitudes. The seeds of these cyclones are generally frontal waves. Preliminary manual studies of the handling of frontal wave / cyclone development by UKMO numerical models suggest that systematic errors exist. Over the north Atlantic the total number of systems seems to be underpredicted, with a marked shortfall southeast of Newfoundland (Figure 1). There is also evidence of systematic underprediction of both deepening and filling of cyclones, in both LAM and global model versions (see Figures 2 and 3, and also Van Der Wal and Milton (1998)). Note that Figure 3 is based on an up to date model version. Similarly there is consensus amongst forecasters that frontal waves are not well handled by numerical models. To put these observations onto a firmer footing a frontal wave database is being developed. This has become possible only recently, with the development of a fully automated model-based method for locating frontal waves (Hewson, 1997).

Past studies in this field have used methods based on surface pressure or near-surface winds. Such methods generally fail to locate cyclones early in their life-cycle. Another feature of some past studies is that they tend to use only analysis fields (to focus on climatology). The database being developed here will use a wide range of forecast lead-times as well as analysis fields. This will allow the systematic errors in the forecast, and their temporal evolution through the forecast period, to be fully documented. The database will also contain a very wide range of diagnostic information for each frontal wave. Such information may in future enable cyclonic developments which are not explicitly represented to be subjectively or objectively anticipated.

## 2. General Format

In October 1997 suggestions on the format of the database were sought from scientists within the Met. Office, at Reading University and at collaborating international institutions. Considerable exchange of ideas and discussions followed. Responses provided the basis for the specification provided here.

Some respondents recommended inclusion of 2 and 3-dimensional arrays of gridded model data around each frontal wave. Others recommended the inclusion of information from imagery. After internal discussion and consideration of available resources these proposals were rejected in favour of a more straightforward approach: only interpolated single point values of model diagnostics would be stored for each frontal wave. It was noted that many of the diagnostics, such as 'vertical velocity due to Q-G forcing', implicitly take into account the atmospheric structure well beyond a point in question. Similarly, inclusion of imagery at this stage would add considerable complexity to the task; a simple 2-D tabular format for the data would enable systematic studies using imagery to be easily carried out by interested parties at a later stage.

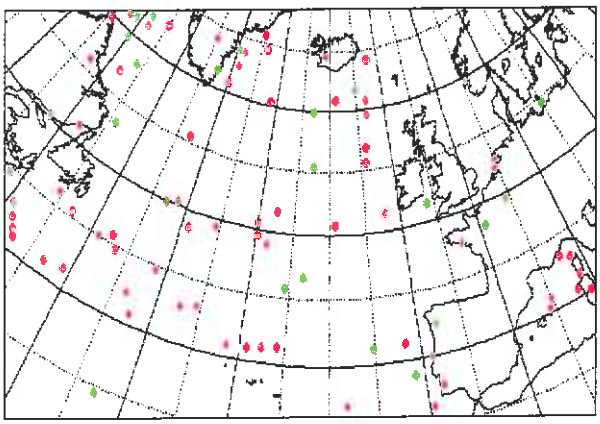


**Figure 1**. Verification of 00z weekday global model forecasts, for T+72, T+96 and T+120 for period 15th Jan 1996 - 15th March 1996. Red dots show positions of analysed low centres and prominent waves for which no counterpart in a particular forecast could be found. Green dots show forecast low centres and prominent waves for which no counterpart in the analysis could be found. Verification was subjective.

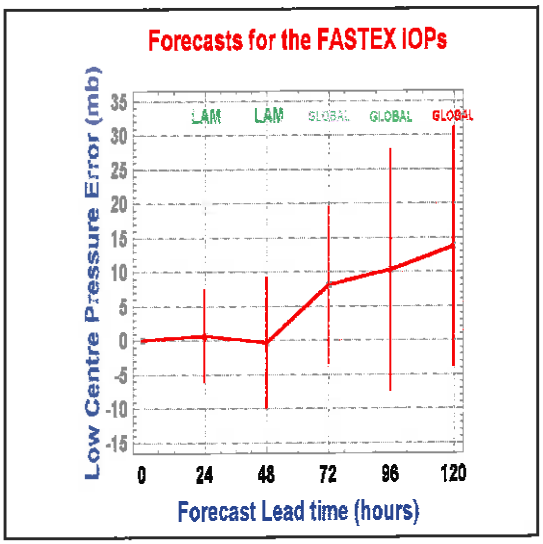



**Figure 2**. Verification of unified model forecasts for lows observed as IOPs during the FASTEX period - Jan and Feb 1997. Verification times centre on when the true low was within the box 10-25W, 45-60N. Average sample size is about 15. Vertical bars show one standard deviation. There is inherent bias in the sample towards lows which were 'well' forecast.

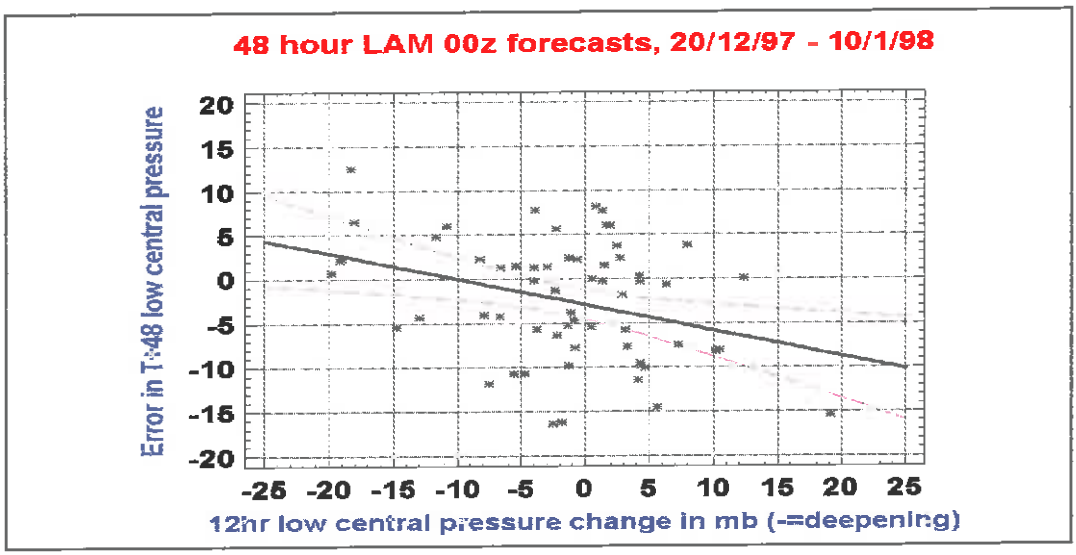



**Figure 3**. Verification of 48 hour LAM 00z forecasts for the box 60W-5E, 40N-65N, for the period 20/12/97 to 10/1/98. The error in low central pressure (that is pressure at centre of forecast low minus pressure at centre of analysed low) is plotted against *true* deepening/filling rate at verification time (uses 18z and 06z LAM analyses spanning the verification times). Black line is based on simple linear regression (R=−0.34), with 95% confidence limits added. This line implies some systematic under-filling of filling depressions, and (to a lesser extent) some systematic under-deepening of rapidly deepening depressions.

# 3. Temporal and Spatial Coverage

It is planned that there will be several stages of development of the database, during which both temporal and spatial coverage will be expanded:

(1)

| | |
|---|---|
| Area: | North Atlantic |
| Real-Time?: | No |
| Model: | LAM |
| Input data resolution: | ~100km interpolated |
| Temporal Coverage: | FASTEX period, Jan+Feb 1997 |
| Forecast range: | T+0 to T+48, 3 hr steps. |
| Time Scale: | Spring 1998 |

(2)

| | |
|---|---|
| Area: | North Atlantic |
| Real-Time?: | Yes |
| Model: | New UM configuration. First model run†. |
| Input data resolution: | ~100km interpolated |
| Temporal Coverage: | 1 Forecast per day (00z). Possibly extend to 4 per day. |
| Forecast range: | T+0 to T+48, 3 hr steps. Perhaps 6hr steps to T+120 for second run†. |
| Time Scale: | Summer 1998 |

(3)

| | |
|---|---|
| Area: | Global |
| Real-Time?: | Yes |
| Model: | New UM configuration. Second model run†. |
| Input data resolution: | ~60km |
| Temporal Coverage: | 2 Forecasts per day (00z and 12z) |
| Forecast Range: | T+0 to T+144, 6hr steps. |
| Time Scale: | Summer 1999 |

Stages (1) and (2) can be achieved with existing resources. Expansion to the global domain in stage (3) will require considerable extra resources - primarily computing power, support and disk space, as outlined in section 5 below - and will thus depend critically on their availability, as well as on the preliminary results of stages (1) and (2).

[†The 'first' and 'second' model runs are the new equivalents of, respectively, the old LAM and global model runs]

# 4. Identification of a Frontal Wave

Hewson's (1997) definition of an objective frontal wave (tip), which consisted of a set of equations ([L?]) and inequalities ([M?]), will be used for the frontal wave database. His definition can be broken down as follows: 'Frontal wave tips are located on the warm air side of regions of low-level Theta-W gradient **[L1]** where the geostrophic Theta-W advection is zero **[L2]** *and* the

cross-front change in thermal gradient is sufficiently large **[M1]** *and* the Theta-W gradient in the adjacent baroclinic zone is sufficiently large **[M2]** *and* the relative vorticity of the cross-front wind is greater than zero **[M3]**'. Together **[L1]**, **[L2]**, **[M1]** and **[M2]** identify the meeting points of cold and warm objective fronts, whilst criterion **[M3]** removes those meeting points which are 'anti-waves' and not waves. Hewson (1997) did not include a complete description of why **[M3]** relates to the vorticity of the cross-front wind; this is given below in Appendix 1.

Several examples of objectively identified frontal waves can be seen on Figure 4 (as well as potential waves, described in section 5); note that the thick red/blue lines, ie the fronts, are really contours satisfying **[L1]** (some have end points due to the effects of **[M1]** and **[M2]**), whilst the thin blue lines are contours satisfying **[L2]**. The places where these two contour fields intersect, and where **[M3]** is also satisfied, are then the tips of objective frontal waves.

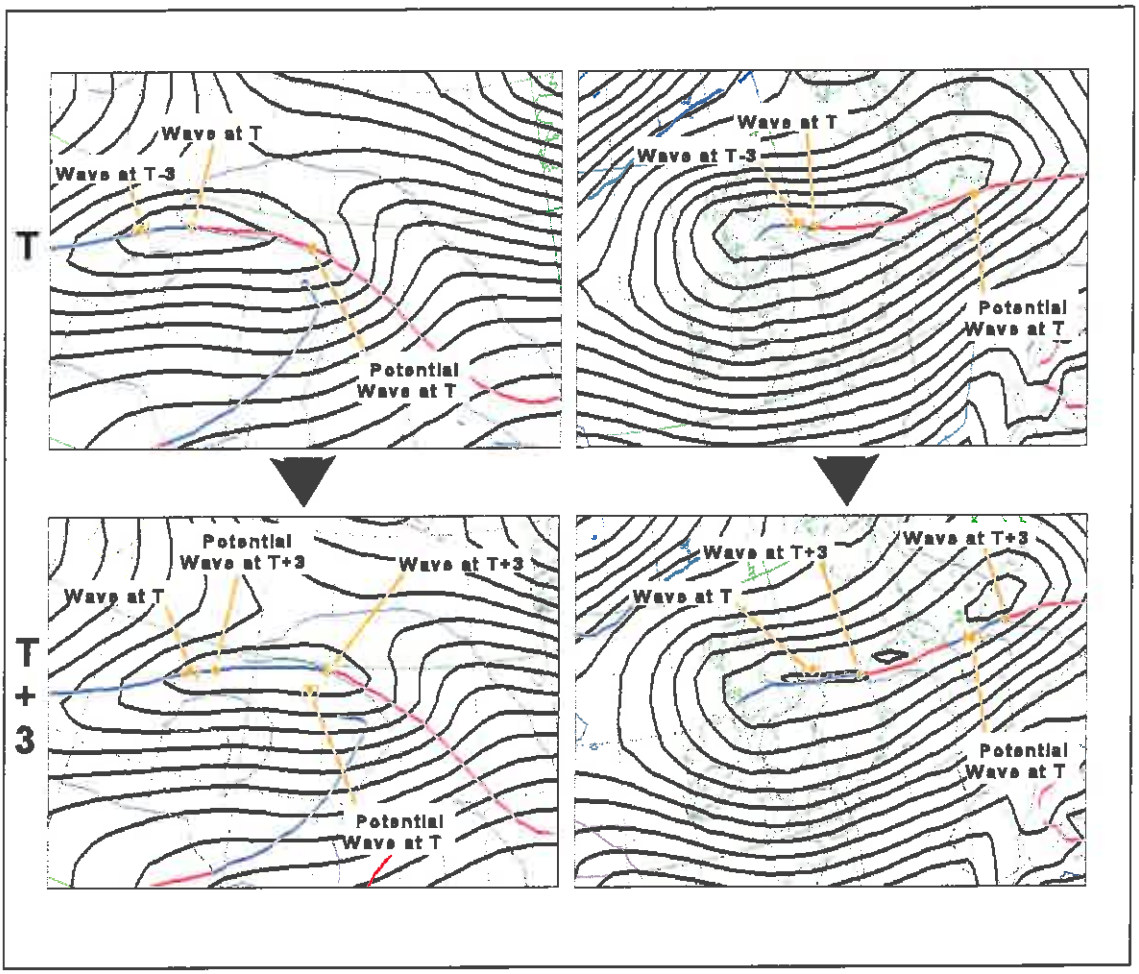



**Figure 4**: Two UM examples (one left, one right) showing objective frontal waves, and their evolution through a 3 hour period (upper panels are for time T, lower panels for T+3). Each example shows a potential wave at time T which becomes a true frontal wave by T+3. Thick red and blue lines are warm and cold objective surface (900mb) fronts; black contours are mean sea level pressure (2mb interval). Orange dots show tips of waves and potential waves, as labelled; bracketed dots are for 3 hours before frame time - included to demonstrate continuity. Thin blue contours denote geostrophic advection of theta-W (at 900mb) equals zero (equation **[L2]**). In both examples potential waves at time T exist close to a parent frontal wave/low; in the right example the parent wave/low maintains identity between T and T+3, in the left example it degenerates into a potential wave as the newer wave develops. T is 12z, 7 March 1998.

Hewson (1997 and 1998) recommended using data from the 900 hPa level to identify objective surface fronts and frontal waves. More recent work indicates that a marked reduction in the

generation of spurious objective frontal waves (and to a lesser extent spurious fronts) near to regions of high topography, and greater self-consistency can be obtained by using, instead, an interpolated model surface whose height is everywhere 1km above the earth's surface. This can, to an accurate approximation, be defined as the surface where:

$$\phi - Z_{orog} = 1\text{km}$$

where $\phi$ is geopotential height and $Z_{orog}$ is the height of the model orography. This will be referred to as the '1km surface'.

# 5. 'Potential' Frontal Waves

Section 4 deals with 'actual' frontal waves. This is somewhat limiting in that there will be no record, in the database, of frontal segments which theoretical ideas (see for example Bishop and Thorpe (1994)) suggest might otherwise be well-suited to frontal wave development. One could address this problem by saving data at regularly spaced intervals along every front. However this would increase dramatically both storage space required, and program run time. An alternative would be to replace the criterion of there being zero geostrophic thermal advection **[L2]**, in the frontal wave tip definition, with the following:

'The along-front gradient of the vorticity of the cross-front geostrophic wind is zero' **[L3]**

This will pinpoint small nuances in the wind/pressure field that correspond, in both synoptic and dynamical terms, with 'potential frontal waves' (new terminology). To avoid the potential wave definition encompassing also true frontal waves (ie 'double-counting'), one additional criterion is also required. This states that:

'There is no along-front change in the sign of the cross-front wind' **[M4]**

We thus define a Potential Frontal Wave (tip) to be any point in space, on the 900mb, or preferably 1km surface, that satisfies **[L1]**, **[L3]**, **[M1]**, **[M2]**, **[M3]** and **[M4]**. This is discussed fully in Appendix 2.

Figure 4 illustrates potential frontal waves, showing how they relate to the structure seen on an (objectively-produced) surface chart; note that the potential waves are located close to weaknesses in the pressure pattern. The figure also shows potential waves evolving into real frontal waves (during the 3 hour period between upper and lower panels), as well as one example of a real frontal wave 'degenerating' into a potential wave. Further discussion and examples of both warm and cold front wave developments can be found in Kurz (1995).

# 6. Data Generation

One aim of this project is to automate the entry of data into the database. The work required has four key components:

(i) Generate *basic* diagnostics from model data
(ii) Identify the locations of the frontal waves
(iii) Extract *basic* model diagnostic data at the locations derived in (i) and write to database
(iiii) Generate *supplementary* diagnostics and add these to the database

A *basic* diagnostic here is a diagnostic which can be calculated without graphical tools, whereas *supplementary* diagnostics are those whose computation does require graphical tools. There are two platforms on which components (i) to (iiii) could be carried out:

(a) VAX + PC-based DISP display system
(b) HP workstation + PV-Wave graphics package

The existing facilities and the work required for each of the four components, for each of the two platforms, are outlined below:

(i) At present the *basic* diagnostic quantities can be generated at JCMM from COSMOS fields files of fundamental variables (see Panagi, 1997).

(a) The generation of these diagnostic quantities on the VAX, for a standard north Atlantic area, is already automatic; 4 LAM forecasts and one LAM analysis are processed in this way at JCMM every day. A few of the diagnostics recommended in the table below are new, but adding these to the current package is straightforward.

(b) Code exists to run on HP workstations to generate the same variables for larger domains, at full model resolution, but this is not currently automatic. More resources would be required.

(ii) Frontal wave identification is a semi-graphical procedure, as described in Hewson (1997 and 1998).

(a) The DISP system can perform this function automatically and quickly, on a stand alone PC, without interfering with or interference from other users.

(b) PV-Wave code has also been developed to perform this function automatically. However it is slow, and, by virtue of running on a network, can affect or be affected by other users. In some ways this platform is more flexible than the PC platform. However further expenditure on resources would be required to realise this flexibility.

(iii) There is currently no code to do this.

(a) PASCAL code integrated into the DISP system will be straightforward to develop.

(b) PV-Wave code should also be straightforward to develop.

(iiii) This requires the interleaving of FORTRAN diagnostics programs and graphics.

(a) Code exists for both the diagnostic computation and the graphics, but only in a semi-automated form. Some work is required to interleave the two. A blueprint describing how this interleaving will work has been produced.

(b) There is no working code for either the diagnostics or the graphics. If a version which worked on any domain were required several man months work would be necessary to even match current levels on platform (a).

In view of the extra resources required to utilise platform (b), stages (1) and (2) in section 3 will be performed using platform (a). Stage (3) in section 3 will almost certainly have to use

platform (b). There are several possible ways of reducing the necessary work; for example the *supplementary* diagnostics could be dropped. Further proposals regarding stage (3) will be devised as results from stages (1) and (2) become apparent.

# 7. Content of Database

## 1) Layout

Data will be stored in a 2-dimensional tab-delimited tabular format, where one row, terminated by carriage return - line feed, represents one objective frontal wave identified in an analysis or forecast.

There will be no file headers or column headings in standard files. File header type information, such as date, model etc. is stored within the data columns. The tab-delimited format will render the extra space required from this approach as minimal. Standard auxiliary file(s) of column headings will be made available for concatenation onto the top of data. Thus implicit column headings will be generally consistent across files; a standard layout will be devised at the outset, and association with this will be signified by the third character in the file name extension. This methodology will allow ready concatenation of multiple data files for statistical and other analysis using a simple copy command of the form "COPY *.??A WAVES.01A".

Column headings in the auxiliary file(s) will be alphanumeric, will be case-sensitive, will contain a maximum of 8 characters each and will all begin with a letter.

Numerical data will be stored as non-decimal numeric values, with 5 digit precision, with values in the range -90000 to 90000 permissible for true values. 99999 will be the missing data indicator. Suitable scalings and units for each data element are given in the table below, and will be made available as additional concatenatable auxiliary files. Chosen scalings for many quantities assume a 'typical' table entry will be of order 100, when any horizontal spatial derivatives have been computed using centred finite differencing across about 200km; this compromises between brevity and precision, and allows for semi-systematic increases occurring in certain values, such as vorticity, if and when smaller gridlengths are utilised.

A few columns will be character-based, with an upper limit on character number of 6. ! will be the missing data indicator for character variables.

SIMPLIFIED EXAMPLE: (data file with two auxiliary header files - 'column title' and 'scaling information' - concatenated on top):

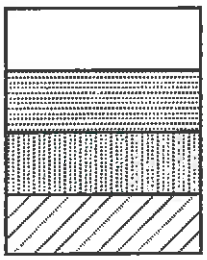
| Model | Date | Time | LeadTime | Region | Lat | Lon | MSLP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L=LAM | dd/mm/yy | Hours*1 | Hours*1 | | Deg*10 | Deg*10 | Mb |
| L | 14/01/98 | 6 | 0 | A | 515 | -10 | 1000 |
| L | 14/01/98 | 9 | 3 | A | 525 | -5 | 996 |
| L | 14/01/98 | 12 | 3 | A | 600 | -120 | 99999 |

A real file will contain many more columns than this example.

## 2) Variables

The table below lists variables that will be stored in the database, for each frontal wave. Three variable types are indicated; N=numerical variable, C*? indicates character variable, with ? characters, and D indicates a dd/mm/yy date-format numerical variable. This date format is suited to Windows database/statistical packages such as Excel and Statgraphics. Some date information is 'duplicated' in a Year 2000-compliant format (end of table).

*Basic* variables are shown in normal font, ***supplementary*** variables in bold. Row shading pertains to document(s) which reference the quoted variables as follows:



Self-explanatory or see Panagi and Dicks (1997)

Hewson (1997) and this document (including Appendices)

Hewson (1998)

Renfrew et al (1996)

| | Column Heading | Standard Symbol | Description | Var Type | Units and Scaling, or †nature of char. entry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Model | - | Version of Met Office Unified Model | C*2 | †e.g. L1 |
| 2 | Region | - | Region used in frontal wave analysis | C*2 | †e.g. D1 |
| 3 | Resoln | - | Typical horizontal resolution of input data | N | Km *1 |
| 4 | ProjWind | - | Projection information for interpreting vector and other 'x' and 'y' components | C*6 | †e.g. PS20W |
| 5 | AnDate | DT | Date of analysis | D | dd/mm/yy |
| 6 | AnWkDay | - | Day of week for analysis | C*2 | †e.g. MO |
| 7 | AnTime | DT | Time of analysis | N | Hrs *1 |
| 8 | AcDate | VT | Validating date of data | D | dd/mm/yy |
| 9 | AcWkDay | - | Validating day of week of data | C*2 | †e.g. MO |
| 10 | AcTime | VT | Validating time of data | N | Hrs *1 |
| 11 | LeadTime | - | Difference of forecast time from analysis time (total hrs) | N | Hrs *1 |
| 12 | Lat | $\phi$ | Latitude of frontal wave (+=N) | N | Deg *10 |
| 13 | Lon | $\lambda$ | Longitude of frontal wave (+=E) | N | Deg *10 |
| 14 | WavType | - | Actual wave or Potential wave (section 4 and 5 above) | C*1 | †A or P |
| 15 | WavStren | - | Standard or Weak wave (section 4 above) | C*1 | †S or W |
| 16 | WaveErr | $\delta c_{wave}$ | Frontal wave location error (in Hewson(97)) | N | km *1 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | WavFType | - | Warm front wave or Cold front wave (Appendix 5) | C*1 | †W or C |
| 18 | MSLP | P | Mean sea level pressure | N | hPa *10 |
| 19 | MSLPtype | - | Raw MSLP or derived from 1000mb height? | C*1 | †R or H |
| 20 | RVor1 | $\xi$ | Relative Vorticity at 1km | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 21 | RVor1XF | - | Relative vorticity of the cross-front wind at 1km (Appendix 3) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 22 | RVor1LF | - | Relative vorticity of the along-front wind at 1km (Appendix 3) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 23 | GRVor1 | $\xi_G$ | Geostrophic Relative Vorticity at 1km | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 24 | GRVor1XF | - | Relatrve vorticity of the cross-front geostrophic wind at 1km (Appendix 3) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 25 | GRVor1LF | - | Relative vorticity of the along-front geostrophic wind at 1km (Appendix 3) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 26 | FX | $n_x$ | x-component of the along-front unit vector (Fig A1.3, Appendix 3) | N | *$10^2$ |
| 27 | FY | $n_y$ | y-component of the along-front unit vector (Fig A1.3, Appendix 3) | N | *$10^2$ |
| 28 | Te9 | T | Temperature at 900mb | N | °C *10 |
| 29 | ThW9 | $\theta_{w900}$ | Theta-W at 900mb | N | °C *10 |
| 30 | ThW7 | $\theta_{w700}$ | Theta-W at 700mb | N | °C *10 |
| 31 | ThW5 | $\theta_{w500}$ | Theta-W at 500mb | N | °C *10 |
| 32 | Th9 | $\theta_{900}$ | Potential Temperature at 900mb | N | °C *10 |
| 33 | Th7 | $\theta_{700}$ | Potential Temperature at 700mb | N | °C *10 |
| 34 | Th5 | $\theta_{500}$ | Potential Temperature at 500mb | N | °C *10 |
| 35 | ABZGrThW | $\lvert\nabla\theta_w\rvert_{ABZ}$ | Theta-W gradient in the adjacent baroclinic zone at 1km | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 36 | AFGrThW | $\nabla\theta_w\cdot\hat{\mathbf{n}}$ | Along-front Theta-W gradient at 1km | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 37 | Fr600ThW | in Hewson(98) | Value of Theta-W front locating diagnostic at 600mb | N | °C/Km$^2$ *$10^8$ |
| 38 | GThWAdv6 | $-\mathbf{V}_G\cdot\nabla\theta_w$ | Geostrophic advection of Theta-W at 600mb | N | °C/s *$10^6$ |
| 39 | ABZGrTh | $\lvert\nabla\theta\rvert_{ABZ}$ | Theta gradient in the adjacent baroclinic zone at 1km | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 40 | AFGrTh | $\nabla\theta\cdot\hat{\mathbf{n}}$ | Along-front Theta gradient at 1km | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 41 | Fr600Th | in Hewson(98) | Value of Theta front locating diagnostic at 600mb | N | °C/Km$^2$ *$10^8$ |
| 42 | GThAdv6 | $-\mathbf{V}_G\cdot\nabla\theta$ | Geostrophic advection of Theta at 600mb | N | °C/s *$10^6$ |
| 43 | U7 | $U_{700}$ | U Component at 700mb | N | m/s *10 |
| 44 | V7 | $V_{700}$ | V component at 700mb | N | m/s *10 |
| 45 | U5 | $U_{500}$ | U Component at 500mb | N | m/s *10 |
| 46 | V5 | $V_{500}$ | V component at 500mb | N | m/s *10 |
| 47 | U3 | $U_{300}$ | U Component at 300mb | N | m/s *10 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 48 | V3 | $V_{300}$ | V component at 300mb | N | m/s *10 |
| 49 | PV1km | - | PV at 1km | N | PVunits *100 |
| 50 | PV2ht | - | Height of PV2 surface (scan down) | N | dm |
| 51 | PVfold | - | Whether fold exists in surface of PV=1.5 PV units | C*1 | Y or N |
| 52 | W9 | $\omega_{900}$ | Model Vertical velocity at 900mb | N | cm/s *100 |
| 53 | W7 | $\omega_{700}$ | Model Vertical velocity at 700mb | N | cm/s *100 |
| 54 | W5 | $\omega_{500}$ | Model Vertical velocity at 500mb | N | cm/s *100 |
| 55 | Div1000 | $\nabla\cdot V_{1000}$ | Divergence at 1000mb | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 56 | Div900 | $\nabla\cdot V_{900}$ | Divergence at 900mb | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 57 | Div800 | $\nabla\cdot V_{800}$ | Divergence at 800mb | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 58 | Div500 | $\nabla\cdot V_{500}$ | Divergence at 500mb | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 59 | Div300 | $\nabla\cdot V_{300}$ | Divergence at 300mb | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 60 | LandSea | - | Whether nearest gridpoint is land or sea | C*1 | †L or S |
| 61 | SeaGrPts | - | Number of the 9 adjacent gridpoints which are sea | N | *1 |
| 62 | SST | $T_{surf}$ | Land/Sea Surface Temperature at nearest grid point | N | °C *10 |
| 63 | GrSST | $\lvert\nabla T_{surf}\rvert$ | Gradient of Land/Sea Surface Temperature | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 64 | GrSSTx | $\partial T_{surf}/\partial x$ | 'X'-component of the Land/Sea Surface Temperature gradient | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 65 | GrSSTy | $\partial T_{surf}/\partial y$ | 'Y'-component of the Land/Sea Surface Temperature gradient | N | °C/km *$10^4$ |
| 66 | AlphaMin | $\alpha_{min}$ | Critical environmental strain threshold (Appendix 3) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 67 | VortMeth | - | Method by which vorticity values (eg. vars 20-22) were calculated (Appendix 3) | C*6 | †e.g. OICFLG |
| 68 | UE | $U_E$ | U component of the environmental wind | N | m/s *10 |
| 69 | VE | $V_E$ | V component of the environmental wind | N | m/s *10 |
| 70 | dVEdS | $\partial V_{Es}/\partial s$ | Rate of change of the front-parallel component of the environmental wind in a front-parallel direction | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 71 | dVEdN | $\partial V_{Es}/\partial n$ | Rate of change of the front-parallel component of the environmental wind in a front-normal direction | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 72 | RH9 | - | Relative humidity w.r.t. ice at 900mb | N | % *10 |
| 73 | RH7 | - | Relative humidity w.r.t. ice at 700mb | N | % *10 |
| 74 | RH5 | - | Relative humidity w.r.t. ice at 500mb | N | % *10 |
| 75 | WQGT7 | $\omega_{qg7}$ | Vertical velocity at 700mb attributable to q-g forcing | N | cm/s *100 |
| 76 | WQGU7 | $\omega_{qgu7}$ | Vertical velocity at 700mb attributable to q-g forcing above 650mb | N | cm/s *100 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 77 | WQGM7 | $\omega_{qgm7}$ | Vertical velocity at 700mb attributable to q-g forcing between 850mb and 550mb | N | cm/s *100 |
| 78 | WQGL7 | $\omega_{qgl7}$ | Vertical velocity at 700mb attributable to q-g forcing below 750mb | N | cm/s *100 |
| 79 | THIKN05 | $Z_T$ | 1000-500mb thickness | N | dm *10 |
| 80 | ShRVort3 | $\zeta_{sh}$ | Shear relative vorticity at 300mb | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^6$ |
| 81 | GOcRate1 | $\gamma_G$ | Geostrophic rate of occlusion at 1km; n=4, R=100km (Appendix 4) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 82 | GOcRate2 | $\gamma_G$ | Geostrophic rate of occlusion at 1km; n=4, R=200km (Appendix 4) | N | $s^{-1}$ *$10^7$ |
| 83 | AnDay | - | Date (day) of analysis | N | *1 |
| 84 | AnMonth | - | Month of analysis | N | *1 |
| 85 | AnYear | - | Year of analysis (4 digit) | N | *1 (e.g. 2000) |

**Table 1**: The contents of the frontal wave database

The potential use of most of these variables should be clear. Others require some explanation. For example the values/signs of variables 37 and 38 should allow the relative positions of upper objective fronts to be deduced; this is likely to relate to the stage of development of the wave. Similarly, the sign of variable 80 allows one to infer whether the frontal wave is on the poleward or equatorward side of any upper level jet stream.

# 7. Data Storage

If one allows for there being about 20 frontal waves in total (includes weak and potential waves) at any analysis or forecast time, and a total of about 85 variables, then frontal wave data for a full 48-hour LAM forecast for the north Atlantic area to be used in stages (1) and (2) (section 3) will occupy about 140,000 bytes. Similarly, one weeks worth of data, comprising one 48-hour forecast per day, plus a set of analysis files, would take up about 1.5Mbyte. A global dataset, as proposed in stage (3) of section 3, for one week, for similar resolution, would occupy of order 15Mbytes.

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## Appendix 1: The vorticity of the cross-front geostrophic wind

This Appendix relates masking inequality **[M3]** in Hewson(1997), that is the wave / anti-wave discriminant, to the sign of the relative vorticity of the cross-front geostrophic wind. **[M3]** is:

$$\left[\nabla|\nabla\tau|\times\hat{\mathbf{k}}\right]\cdot\left[\nabla[-\mathbf{V}_G\cdot\nabla\tau]\right] > 0$$

where $\tau$ is the surrogate for a thermodynamic variable, usually wet-bulb potential temperature, $\mathbf{V_G}$ is geostrophic wind, and $\nabla$ is a horizontal or pressure-level gradient operator. Provided $|\nabla\tau|>0$ everywhere then the contour field of $(-\mathbf{V_G}.\nabla\tau=0)$ will be identical to the contour field of $((-\mathbf{V_G}.\nabla\tau)/|\nabla\tau|=0)$. Thus the vectors $\nabla(-\mathbf{V_G}.\nabla\tau)$ and $\nabla((-\mathbf{V_G}.\nabla\tau)/|\nabla\tau|)$ will be unidirectional wherever $-\mathbf{V_G}.\nabla\tau=0$ (which includes the tips of all waves and anti-waves). Thus (by also dividing throughout by $|\nabla|\nabla\tau||$) **[M3]** can be re-written as:

$$\frac{\left[\nabla|\nabla\tau|\times\hat{\mathbf{k}}\right]}{\left|\nabla|\nabla\tau|\right|}\cdot\nabla\left[\frac{-\mathbf{V_G}\cdot\nabla\tau}{|\nabla\tau|}\right] > 0 \qquad \textbf{(A1.1)}$$

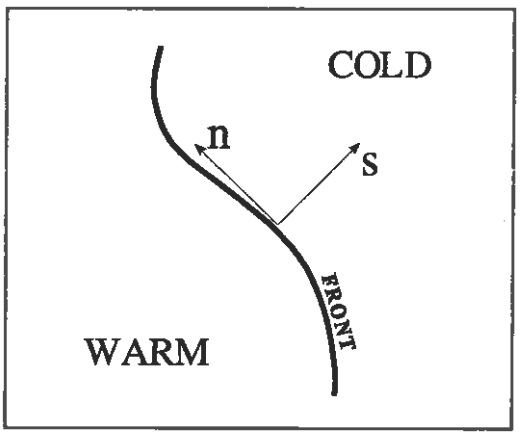


**Figure A1.1**: definition of a local front-relative co-ordinate system (*s,n*), as in Hewson (1998).

Now $\hat{\mathbf{s}}$ and $\hat{\mathbf{n}}$ are, respectively, the cross- and along-front unit vectors of a locally defined front-relative co-ordinate system (*s,n*) (Figure A1.1). They are given by:

$$\hat{\mathbf{s}} = \frac{\nabla|\nabla\tau|}{\left|\nabla|\nabla\tau|\right|} \qquad \text{and} \qquad \hat{\mathbf{n}} = -\hat{\mathbf{s}}\times\hat{\mathbf{k}}$$

Also, if there is no along front-thermal gradient, which is a good approximation at the tips of frontal waves and frontal anti-waves, then

$$\hat{\mathbf{s}} = -\frac{\nabla\tau}{|\nabla\tau|}$$

Thus equation (A1.1) can be reduced to

$$\left(-\hat{\mathbf{n}}\cdot\nabla[\mathbf{V_G}\cdot\hat{\mathbf{s}}]\right) > 0$$

That is:

$$(-\hat{\mathbf{n}})\cdot\left[\hat{\mathbf{s}}\frac{\partial(\mathbf{V_G}\cdot\hat{\mathbf{s}})}{\partial s}+\hat{\mathbf{n}}\frac{\partial(\mathbf{V_G}\cdot\hat{\mathbf{s}})}{\partial n}\right] > 0$$

Thus

$$\left(-\frac{\partial(\mathbf{V_G}\cdot\hat{\mathbf{s}})}{\partial n}\right) > 0 \qquad \text{or} \qquad \left(-\frac{\partial V_{Gs}}{\partial n}\right) > 0$$

where $V_{Gs}$ is the local cross-front geostrophic wind. The bracketed quantities here thus represent 'the relative vorticity of the local cross-front geostrophic wind', or $\xi_{G(\text{cross-front-wind})}$. Note also that the full geostrophic relative vorticity, $\xi_G$, can be written as:

$$\xi_G = \xi_{G(\text{along-front-wind})} + \xi_{G(\text{cross-front-wind})} = \frac{\partial V_{Gn}}{\partial s} - \frac{\partial V_{Gs}}{\partial n} \qquad \textbf{(A1.2)}$$

where, similarly, $\xi_{G(\text{along-front-wind})}$ is 'the relative vorticity of the local along-front, or front-parallel, geostrophic wind'.

## Appendix 2: Identifying 'potential waves'

This Appendix describes the rationale for identifying 'potential (frontal) waves'. If an experienced forecaster or synoptician were presented with the isobars and fronts shown on Figure A2.1 and asked to identify regions in which frontal waves seemed to be most likely to develop, they would almost certainly select the locations marked '$C_w$' and '$C_c$', on account of weaknesses in the isobaric patterns nearby. These weaknesses are really areas where there is a local increase

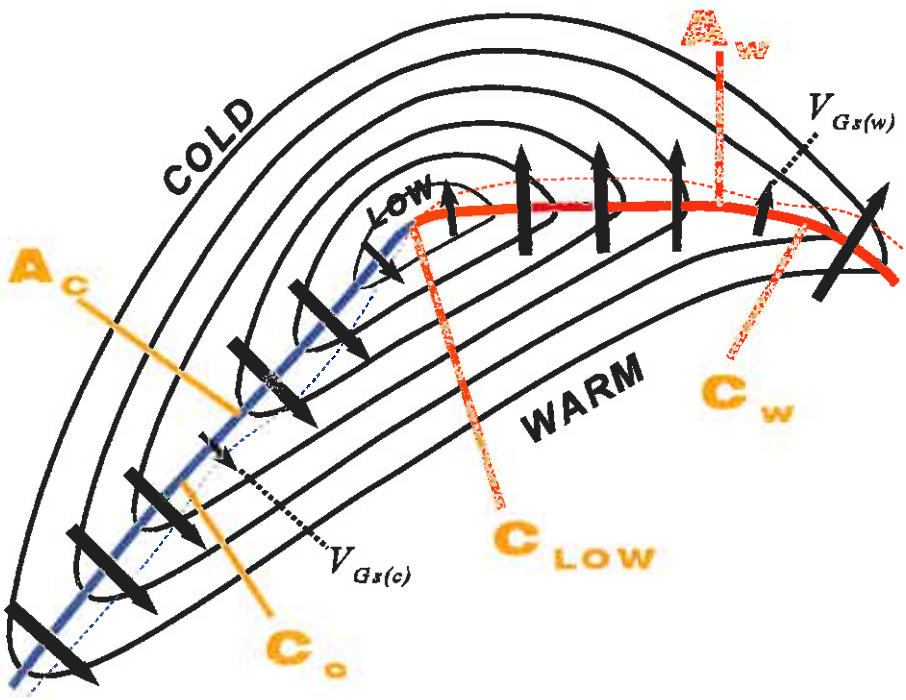


**Figure A2.1** Schematic representation of an idealised mid-latitude depression (marked $C_{LOW}$). Thin black lines are isobars (omitted around edges); thick red and blue lines are warm and cold fronts respectively. Thin dashed red and blue lines show approximate frontal positions a short time later (system-relative frame). The two airmasses are labelled. Arrows represent cross-front geostrophic wind components. Letters $C_C$ and $C_W$ denote potential (frontal) waves, letters $A_C$ and $A_W$ potential anti-waves (see text).

in the along-front isobaric spacing, or equivalently a local reduction in the cross-front geostrophic wind ($V_{Gs}$ in Appendix 1 terminology). Vectors of $V_{Gs}$, as deduced from the isobaric spacing, are shown on the Figure. *Small changes* to either of the smaller vectors labelled $V_{Gs(w)}$ and $V_{Gs(c)}$ could change the *signs* of those winds, in which case the warm front segment bounded approximately by points $A_W$ and $C_W$ would change to a cold front, or the cold front segment bounded

approximately by points $A_c$ and $C_c$ would change to a warm front. If this happened then we would have a true frontal wave at $C_w$ (or $C_c$) and a true anti-wave at $A_w$ (or $A_c$), because true frontal waves and anti-waves lie at cold/warm front meeting points. So because only small wind changes are required near $C_w$ and $C_c$ on Figure A2.1 to produce real frontal waves, we can say that these points represent 'potential (frontal) waves' (and $A_w$ and $A_c$ 'potential anti-waves'). Also, if one considers advecting the fronts, for a small timestep, according to the cross-front winds $V_{Gs}$ shown, then it is clear that small ripples, or changes in orientation, would develop on both the warm front and the cold front, close to the vectors $V_{Gs(w)}$ and $V_{Gs(c)}$, as shown by the thin dashed lines. Such ripples also hint at possible wave development.

What is required now is a mathematical method for objectively pinpointing potential waves that is consistent with the synoptic practice referred to above, simple to apply and dynamically correct. Such a method should be based on $V_{Gs}$. Consider the relative vorticity of this wind, $\xi_{G(\text{cross-front-wind})}$. There are three places on the front where this clearly reaches a maximum, that is to say there are three places where there is a maximum cyclonic rotation of $V_{Gs}$. These are $C_w$ and $C_c$ (the potential waves) and '$C_{LOW}$' (a true wave, or depression). Similarly there are two places where there is a maximum in anticyclonic rotation of $V_{Gs}$; these are $A_w$ and $A_c$, the 'potential anti-waves'. Thus, as the five A and C locations all represent turning points, in the along-front direction, of the variable $\xi_{G(\text{cross-front-wind})}$, they can be mathematically identified by the following diagnostic:

$$\frac{\partial \xi_{G(\text{cross-front-wind})}}{\partial n} = 0 \qquad \text{or} \qquad \frac{\partial^2 V_{Gs}}{\partial n^2} = 0 \qquad \textbf{[L3]}$$

By combining **[L3]** with **[L1]**, **[M1]** and **[M2]** in Hewson (1998), which together defined an objective front, we now have a mathematical definition which encompasses both potential waves and potential anti-waves. By then adding a criterion that states that the vorticity of the cross front wind must be greater than zero, ie **[M3]** (see Appendix 1), we will successfully eliminate all the 'potential anti-waves'.

If one accepts that frontal waves, and thus potential waves, are characterised by cyclonic rotation of their fronts, and that, to a good first approximation this rotation can be attributed to 'geostrophic frontal advection', then the definition that has been given can be considered dynamically correct (note how frontal segments near to both $C_w$ and $C_c$ on Figure A2.1 undergo slight cyclonic rotation as they move towards the positions shown by thin dashed lines). One might wish to use the full geostrophic relative vorticity instead of the vorticity of the cross-front geostrophic wind in the computation; however this would have the disadvantage of being 'contaminated' by the along front wind, $V_{Gn}$, which should have no direct impact on frontal rotation.

There remains one problem. This is that the main low centre on the example in Figure A2.1 will have been identified as both a true frontal wave and a potential frontal wave. One could use searching algorithms to avoid this 'double counting'. However, a better and more complete solution is to use one additional diagnostic, in the definition of a potential wave, that will have the effect of excluding those which are 'also' true waves. The main difference between waves and potential waves (so far) is that the geostrophic thermal advection is only zero at a true wave. However it would be difficult to utilise this in practice because, due to the graphical interpolation, most potential waves that are really replicating a true wave will not coincide *exactly* with where the geostrophic thermal advection is zero. A more reliable method can be deduced by referring

to Figure A2.1. Note that the sign of the scalar quantity $V_{Gs}$ does not change, in the along-front direction, across $C_c$ and $C_w$, but does change at '$C_{LOW}$'. Therefore:

$$\text{At } C_c \text{ and } C_w \quad \left|\frac{\partial|V_{Gs}|}{\partial n}\right| = \left|\frac{\partial V_{Gs}}{\partial n}\right| \qquad \text{whilst at } C_{LOW} \quad \left|\frac{\partial|V_{Gs}|}{\partial n}\right| \ll \left|\frac{\partial V_{Gs}}{\partial n}\right|$$

So a suitable criterion to complete the definition of a potential frontal wave (along with **[L1]**, **[L3]**, **[M1]**, **[M2]** and **[M3]**) is:

$$\left|\frac{\partial|V_{Gs}|}{\partial n}\right| \Bigg/ \left|\frac{\partial V_{Gs}}{\partial n}\right| \geq K_4 \qquad \textbf{[M 4]}$$

where $K_4$ is the masking criterion threshold. Tuning will be required to find an appropriate value for $K_4$, to accommodate rounding errors and the effects of interpolation, but it is likely to be just less than 1.

Note also that the sign of the geostrophic thermal advection (diagnostic in **[L2]**) allows one to discriminate between potential warm front waves and potential cold front waves (Appendix 5).

## Appendix 3: Critical strain threshold and intrinsic frontal vorticity

Bishop & Thorpe (1994) and Renfrew et al (1997) indicate that there is a theoretical threshold value ($\alpha_{min}$), for the along-front strain of the horizontal environmental flow field, in the vicinity of a front, above which wave growth, on that front, will be suppressed. By assuming that the absolute vorticity in the general frontal environment, but remote from the front itself, can be approximated by $f$ (the Coriolis parameter) equation (5.7) in Bishop & Thorpe (1994) reduces to:

$$\alpha_{min} = \left(\frac{f}{4}\right)\left(\frac{\xi_{Front}}{\xi_{Front} + f}\right) e^{\left(-2\pi\frac{W}{L}\right)} \qquad \textbf{(A3.1)}$$

where

| | |
|---|---|
| $W$ | is the width of the frontal strip, |
| $L$ | is the length of the frontal strip, |
| $\xi_{Front}$ | is the intrinsic relative vorticity of the frontal strip. |

Now let:

| | |
|---|---|
| $\xi_{Front(Model)X}$ | be a model estimate of the intrinsic relative vorticity of the frontal strip computed using differencing method X, |
| $\xi_{Wave(Model)X}$ | be a model estimate of the intrinsic relative vorticity of any wave or potential wave, computed using differencing method X, |

$\xi_{(Model)X}$ be the full model relative vorticity, *at* the front, computed using differencing method X.

so that:

$$\xi_{(Model)X} = \xi_{Front(Model)X} + \xi_{Wave(Model)X}$$

In principle it should be reasonably straightforward to compute $\alpha_{min}$ in equation (A3.1) from gridded model data, by assuming that the hypothetical frontal wave with which we are dealing will have the structure of the most unstable unstrained barotropic normal mode, that is one for which (W/L) = 1/8. However we do not know $\xi_{Front}$.

In the first instance we can calculate $\xi_{(Model)X}$, but actually want to find a value for $\xi_{Front(Model)X}$ to provide an estimate of $\xi_{Front}$. We know that *for a straight 2-dimensional front* (i.e. no waves or potential waves) $\xi_{Wave(Model)X}=0$, and also that

$$\xi_{Front(Model)X} = \frac{\partial V_n}{\partial s} \qquad \textbf{(A3.2)}$$

which is the shear in the along-front (front-parallel) wind. If we then assume that, *for fronts in general,* the contribution of waves and potential waves to the shear in the along-front wind is relatively small, it follows that equation (A3.2) will in fact will hold for all fronts. Similarly,

$$\xi_{Wave(Model)X} = -\frac{\partial V_s}{\partial n} \qquad \textbf{(A3.3)}$$

which is the shear in the cross-front wind, will hold for all fronts. Investigation of a limited number of real cases suggests that waves or potential waves, on a front, do indeed make a relatively small contribution to the shear in the along-front wind, but even if this were not true equation (A3.2) would still give a better estimate than just using $\xi_{(Model)X}$. Thus we would recommend, in the first instance, using $\partial V_n/\partial s$ to provide an estimate of $\xi_{Front}$ for equation (A3.1). Note that Renfrew et al (1997) use an along-front average of $\xi_{(Model)X}$; equation (A3.2) is providing an alternative which can be computed at individual gridpoints, and is thus more easily utilised for the frontal wave database.

It is important to now consider the impact of using different differencing methods (X) to compute $\xi_{Front(Model)X}$ in equation (A3.2). Note that the value of any gradient quantity, such as $\partial V_n/\partial s$, computed from gridded model data, depends on the following:

1) The basic model gridlength
2) The finite differencing scheme used
3) Interpolation before and/or after the computation

One would hope that the effect of varying these parameters would be small enough to be ignored. However across features which tend to exhibit a discontinuous structure, such as fronts, this is not true. As an example, consider, for a particular front, a model for which (i) gridlength is greater than the true distance across which the vector wind change occurs, and (ii) gridpoint values accurately represent the true winds. Then model values of $\xi_{Front(Model)X}$, derived using simple finite differencing techniques on gridpoint winds, will be inversely proportional to the lengthscale ($d_X$)

used in the computation, i.e.

$$\xi_{\text{Front(Model)X}} \propto \frac{1}{d_X} \qquad \textbf{(A3.2)}$$

This means (for example) that if one were to use first order centred finite differencing on a staggered grid, to compute $\xi_{\text{Front(Model)X}}$ between adjacent wind gridpoints, the values obtained would be twice those obtained if a non-staggered grid had been used. Thus the subscript 'X', representing the method of computation, is significant (variable 67 in the database will describe the method - for example 'O1CFLG' would indicate that **1**st **O**rder **C**entred **F**inite differencing had been applied on the **L**ocal **G**rid, ie the grid as represented by variables 1 to 4).

What is really required is an 'intrinsic model (frontal) relative vorticity'. This can only be computed with a full knowledge of the way in which the momentum equations are formulated within the model itself, and thus the method of computation may vary with model. Thus it is not possible to state here a method of computing $\xi_{\text{Front}}$, nor, therefore, $\alpha_{\text{min}}$, which would be appropriate for all models and projections.

There are also a number of related theoretical questions to be addressed. Some are listed below ('mature fronts' here means fronts that possess a relatively discontinuous wind structure):

1) What is the smallest wavelength frontal wave that a particular model can be expected to represent well?
2) Should it be just waves of very small length scales that grow on mature fronts?
3) Do synoptic scale waves grow on mature fronts, and if so by what mechanism?
4) When assessing the importance of the along-front stretching as regards synoptic wave development should we be excluding non-mature fronts?

Whilst recognising that there are still a number of issues to be resolved, in the database we will be including, for convenience, 'trial' values for $\alpha_{\text{min}}$. These will simply be derived on the basis of equation (A3.1), with $\partial V_n/\partial s$ substituted for $\xi_{\text{Front}}$ and computed as indicated by variable 67.

## Appendix 4: Geostrophic rate of occlusion

Although the structure and even the existence of occlusions has recently come under close scrutiny - as demonstrated by the development of conceptual models of cyclone evolution which incorporate warm and cold fronts but not occlusions (e.g. Shapiro & Keyser (1990) and Monk (1992)) - it should nevertheless be possible to develop a relatively uncontroversial method of computing the speed of rotation of a cold front relative to a warm front, and thence a nominal 'rate of occlusion' for a particular frontal wave or depression. Such a quantity is of interest because it relates to the rate at which the supply of warm low-level air within a weather system is being depleted, most probably through ascent. Such ascent can lead to rapid intensification of the system, particularly if it also involves the release of large amounts of latent heat. A large 'rate of occlusion' will only occur if there is considerable departure, in the wind structure around a low, from an axi-symmetric pattern, and it is probably no coincidence that major mid-latitude storms, such as the October storm of 1987 in Southern England (see Monk for this example and others), often possess a very non axi-symmetric structure in winds and mean sea level pressure, that is consistent with a rapid 'rate of occlusion', during and immediately after the periods when they

were developing most rapidly. Objective fronts can be used to enable the 'Geostrophic rate of occlusion' to be computed automatically as a diagnostic field as described below.

First we define the 'rate of occlusion', for a particular frontal wave or depression, to be:

> 'The difference between the warm front and the cold front angular velocities, estimated using the cross-front wind'

The sign convention is that the rate is positive if the cold front is tending to catch up the warm front. An identical definition of the 'rate of occlusion' is

> 'The average angular velocity, towards the warm air, of the (two) fronts, estimated using the cross-front wind'

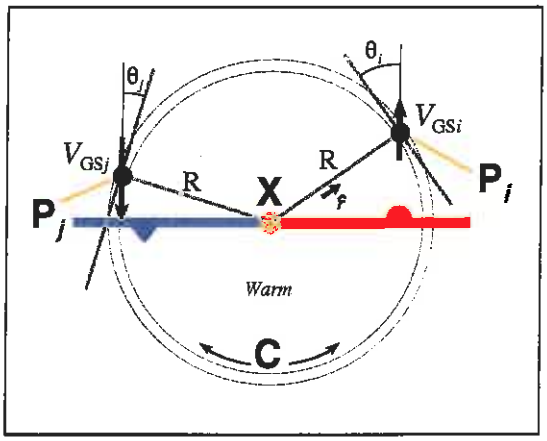


**Figure A4.1** Schematic illustrating the methodology used in computing the 'geostrophic rate of occlusion' about a point X, as explained in the text. X is a wave tip, or depression centre, whilst red and blue lines are (objective) warm and cold surface fronts. C is a circle of radius R whose centre is X.

These two expressions clearly include the assumption that 'frontal advection' gives a good approximation to true frontal movement. We further refine this by utilising the (cross-front) *geostrophic* wind; this is consistent with standard synoptic practice, although it should be noted that we are *not* allowing for the (empirical) tendency of warm fronts to progress at slightly sub-geostrophic speeds (see, for example, Meteorological Office (1991)).

To simplify computation we now assume that the warm and cold fronts are parallel, as in Figure A4.1. With the above assumptions frontal rotation now depends only on the front-normal geostrophic wind, $V_{Gs}$. Then, from Figure A4.1, it is clear that the angular velocity ($\Omega_{GWi}$) of the front, about X, towards the warm air, due to the front normal wind at $P_i$, is given by:

$$\Omega_{GWi} = -\frac{V_{Gsi}\cos\theta_i}{R} = -\frac{V_{Gsi}}{R}\left(\frac{\mathbf{V}_{Gsi}\cdot(\hat{\mathbf{r}}\times\hat{\mathbf{k}})}{|\mathbf{V}_{Gsi}|}\right)$$

where $\hat{\mathbf{r}}$ is a unit radial vector as shown on the Figure. Then the geostrophic rate of occlusion ($\gamma_G$), about a wave tip X, is given by the average value, for all points $P_i$ around a circle centred on X (such as C on Figure A4.1) of $\Omega_{GWi}$. That is:

$$\gamma_G = \frac{-1}{nR}\sum_{i=1}^{n} V_{Gsi}\left(\frac{\mathbf{V}_{Gsi}\cdot(\hat{\mathbf{r}}\times\hat{\mathbf{k}})}{|\mathbf{V}_{Gsi}|}\right) \qquad \textbf{(A4.1)}$$

where $n \geq 3$ and all points $P_i$ are equally spaced around C. In practice the size of the circle C should be of the same order as the systems in question, say R ~ 50-500km to produce meaningful results.

When using a simple non-staggered polar stereographic grid the computation is straightforward. One can use n=4 and R=gridlength in equation (A4.1), so that the summation at

The discussion above pertains only to true frontal waves. Because potential waves do not coincide with a point at which there is zero geostrophic cross-front wind, the concept of 'rate of occlusion' for such features is arguably rather ill-defined. So whilst it is possible to calculate $\gamma_G$ at all points in space, the values attained in the vicinity of potential waves are probably not meaningful. An alternative might have been to use a quantity related to $\partial^2 V_{GS} / \partial n^2$ except that that is, by definition, zero at a potential frontal wave (Appendix 2).

## Appendix 5: Type of Wave

In Appendix 2 it was indicated that the sign of the geostrophic thermal advection at the tip of a potential wave indicates whether that wave is a potential warm front wave or a potential cold front wave. This methodology will not work for true objective frontal waves because they are situated where the geostrophic thermal advection is zero. One might then wish to use the history of such features as an alternative. On Figure 4, for example, both of the new waves on the lower panels could be described as warm front waves, because they originated from potential warm front waves (upper panels). However such an approach would involve tracking lows, which is complex, and inconsistent with the structure of the database as described in this document. A suitable alternative is to use the sign of the 'geostrophic rate of occlusion', $\gamma_G$, (Appendix 4), as the discriminant. Those true waves located where $\gamma_G$ is positive will be cold front waves, and those located where $\gamma_G$ is negative will be warm front waves. This can be explained by reference to Figure A2.1. Consider adding small, additional, symmetrical cyclonic perturbations to the geostrophic cross-front winds near the points labelled $C_C$ and $C_W$ on Figure A2.1, such that the lighter winds just reverse sign. This emulates the development of true cold and warm front waves respectively. Now estimate average values of $\Omega_{GWi}$ at the labelled points (equation A4.1 in Appendix 4), for a radial distance equal to half the vector spacing. At $C_C$, because $V_{GS}$ is on average negative, $\gamma_G$ will be positive, consistent with a cold front wave. The opposite applies at $C_W$. This also hints at why warm front waves tend to be less developmental than cold front waves.

Table A5.1 summarises how waves will be categorised in the frontal wave database.

| | 'Warm Front Wave' | 'Cold Front Wave' |
|---|---|---|
| **Potential Frontal Wave** | Geostrophic thermal advection at wave tip is positive | Geostrophic thermal advection at wave tip is negative |
| **True frontal wave** | Geostrophic rate of occlusion at wave tip is negative | Geostrophic rate of occlusion at wave tip is positive |

**Table A5.1**: The means by which waves will be categorised as warm front waves or cold front waves.

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